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citizens advice

Trussell
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Tackling Destitution Together

Insights for funders

Investing in long-term, preventative and joined up support to tackle hunger and hardship.

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The opportunity

The foundations for change are being established, but achieving lasting transformation requires sustained investment, commitment and the opportunity to scale what works.

Too many people experiencing hunger and hardship struggle to access the support they need until they reach crisis. Support is often fragmented across different organisations and services, making it difficult for people to navigate the help available and get the right support at the right time.

Preventing people from reaching crisis requires more than individual services working harder. It requires local systems to work differently: organisations building trusted partnerships, sharing knowledge and insight, involving people with lived experience, and taking collective responsibility for identifying and responding to people's needs earlier.

Tackling Destitution Together (TDT), an innovative partnership project between Trussell and Citizens Advice (England & Wales), has been exploring how this change can happen in practice. Working across five diverse communities in England and Wales, the programme has tested a place-based approach to strengthening local partnerships and improving access to timely, effective advice and support for people at risk of destitution.

The independent evaluation by Revealing Reality demonstrates the potential of this approach and provides important learning about what it takes to build more preventative, joined-up local systems.

What have we learned from Tackling Destitution Together?

The Tackling Destitution Together Evaluation highlights the importance of bringing organisations together around a shared ambition to prevent hardship, while recognising that every community needs to develop solutions that respond to its own circumstances.

Across the five pilot sites, we have seen promising progress and identified practical approaches that can help strengthen local systems.

1. Stronger partnerships create the foundations for change

Effective collaboration does not happen automatically. Organisations need time and support to build relationships, develop a shared understanding of local challenges and establish ways of working together. TDT has demonstrated the value of bringing frontline organisations together to identify gaps in support, strengthen referral pathways and develop more coordinated responses.

2. Earlier intervention can help prevent people reaching crisis

Community-based advice, targeted support and stronger referral pathways can help people access assistance before their circumstances deteriorate. TDT has demonstrated the potential of working beyond traditional service boundaries to reach people who may otherwise struggle to access advice and support.

3. People's lived experience must shape how support is designed and delivered

People experiencing hardship understand the barriers they face when navigating local services. Involving them in shaping provision can help organisations develop more accessible and responsive support. However, meaningful involvement requires investment in relationships, time and clear processes to ensure people's insights influence decisions and practice.

4. Shared learning and local insight can drive wider systems change

Understanding local needs, using data effectively and learning together are essential to improving how support is delivered. TDT has tested practical tools and approaches, including a Local Systems Change Maturity Matrix, to help organisations understand progress, identify gaps and plan further development.

The evaluation also highlights that progress is not uniform. While there has been encouraging development in partnership-building and early intervention, embedding data-sharing, strengthening collective advocacy and ensuring lived-experience insight consistently influences decision-making require further attention.

Why sustained investment matters

One of the most important lessons from Tackling Destitution Together is that systems change takes time, and short-term funding cannot deliver long-term transformation.

The evaluation found that some pilot sites were only beginning to realise the potential of their partnerships as the funding period came to an end. This reflects a fundamental challenge with short-term project funding: the time needed to establish relationships, build trust and develop new ways of working can leave insufficient time to embed and sustain change.

Preventative approaches require organisations to move beyond delivering individual interventions towards changing how their local systems operate. This involves:

- **Building trusted relationships:** Developing meaningful partnerships across organisations, sectors and communities takes sustained investment and dedicated capacity.
- **Embedding new ways of working:** Training, referral pathways and community-based approaches need time to become part of everyday practice rather than remaining standalone projects.
- **Strengthening local infrastructure:** Effective collaboration depends on the resources, leadership, data and coordination needed to bring organisations together and maintain momentum.
- **Learning, adapting and improving:** Local systems need ongoing opportunities to understand what is working, respond to changing needs and adapt their approaches.
- **Influencing wider change:** Embedding preventative support requires commitment from local and national decision-makers, alongside evidence and collective advocacy.

Without sustained investment, there is a risk that promising approaches remain isolated examples of good practice, rather than becoming an established part of how local services work together.

From learning to wider impact

TDT has generated valuable learning about the conditions, relationships and practical approaches that can help local systems become more preventative and responsive to people's needs.

The opportunity now is to build on this foundation, applying the learning more widely while continuing to test, refine and evaluate the approach.

Scaling TDT should not mean replicating an identical model in every community. It means taking the principles, tools and approaches that have been developed and enabling more local partnerships to adapt them to their own circumstances.

This could include:

- Supporting more local partnerships to develop shared approaches to identifying and responding to people at risk of destitution.
- Strengthening collaboration between advice providers, food banks, local authorities and other community organisations.
- Embedding community-based and preventative advice provision so that people can access support earlier and closer to where they live.
- Developing the skills and confidence of frontline workers to recognise financial hardship and connect people to appropriate support.
- Using local data and people's lived experience to identify gaps, improve services and influence local decision-making.
- Sharing practical tools, resources and learning across the wider Trussell and Citizens Advice networks and the advice sector.

Trussell and Citizens Advice have established networks, relationships and reach that provide a significant opportunity to support wider adoption of these approaches. By combining national infrastructure and shared learning with locally led delivery, we can help move beyond individual pilots towards more consistent, preventative support across communities.

Moving from promise to proof

What a next phase needs to include

- A multi-year delivery window — long enough for local systems to genuinely shift toward early intervention, not just for training to be delivered.
- A robust, theory-based impact evaluation so we can credibly answer whether the model works, for whom, and in what circumstances.
- An independent evaluator and learning partner working alongside delivery sites, building on the model Revealing Reality has tested with us.
- Scale, pilot numbers, duration and budget still to be finalised — we'd welcome shaping this together with funders who share this ambition.

Why now

Policy and funding attention is shifting decisively toward place-based, community-rooted, early-intervention solutions to poverty — connected local systems built on a “no wrong door” principle, so that wherever someone first makes contact, they're connected to the right support rather than passed between services that each hold only part of the picture. Together, we can build on the foundations established through Tackling Destitution Together and turn promising local practice into lasting systems change.

Case Study: Hull pilot

The partnership between Hull Foodbank and Citizens Advice Hull & East Riding demonstrates the potential of investing in trusted local relationships, frontline capability and accessible advice can help prevent people reaching crisis.

The pilot focused on people with disabilities and long-term health conditions, who are at heightened risk of poverty and destitution. Recognising that many people experiencing hardship first disclose their difficulties to trusted community organisations rather than formal advice services, the partnership set out to equip frontline workers to recognise financial hardship and connect people to appropriate support earlier.

The results were significant:

- **152 people** received direct advice and support, generating over **£266,542 in achieved and expected financial gains**.
- **238 frontline workers** from food banks, health services, mental health providers, probation services and community organisations received Advice First Aid training.
- **80 local partners** were engaged and **37 new partnerships** established.
- More than **80 probation officers** received training following sustained relationship-building, with Advice First Aid subsequently embedded within future workforce development plans.

The partnership also developed practical resources, including an online Advice First Aid Kit and a Problem Notifier App, making it easier for frontline workers and residents to find relevant support. Crucially, people with lived experience helped shape these resources and improve their accessibility.

Why this matters for long-term investment

Hull's experience demonstrates that preventative support is about more than delivering advice or establishing referral pathways. It is about changing the capability and confidence of organisations already working with people experiencing hardship, so they can recognise problems earlier and help people access support before their circumstances deteriorate.

The development of partnerships took several months of relationship-building, navigating organisational processes and securing commitment from key individuals. However, this investment resulted in training being incorporated into future workforce development plans, creating the potential for continued impact beyond the funded pilot. However, training alone was not enough to change frontline practice; workers needed accessible tools, ongoing support and opportunities to apply their learning in real situations.

Although the pilot has concluded, elements of the work are continuing through organisational training programmes, local partnerships and wider initiatives to strengthen community resilience.

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